

gender spectrum

Building a Gender-Inclusive Office & Practice

For Medical Providers, Mental Health Professionals, School Nurses, and Healthcare Teams

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Creating an Inclusive Office

Most of what signals "you belong here" to gender-diverse patients happens before the appointment begins: through your website, intake forms, office environment, and everyday interactions. This guide shares best practices to create welcoming spaces for all patients, with particular attention to supporting gender-diverse youth and families. Creating inclusive healthcare environments is not just about values, it has measurable impact. Research shows these environments improve patient satisfaction scores, lead to better health outcomes, and increase patient retention. Many practices find that inclusive approaches benefit all patients by fostering a respectful, welcoming atmosphere.

Why This Matters: When patients feel respected and safe, they are more likely to share important health information, follow care plans, and return for ongoing treatment. Inclusive care is not just the right thing to do, it is linked to better clinical outcomes, reduced healthcare disparities, and improved trust between patients and providers.

Implementation tip: Use this guide as a menu of options. Even implementing a few changes will make a meaningful difference and will be noticed by those you serve. As indicated by patients, the most critical elements are: clear visual signals (such as "all are welcome here" stickers) on websites and office entryways, consistent use of their personal pronouns and chosen names regardless of legal status, and accessible bathrooms they can use without question

Rural & Small Practice Considerations: Many recommendations can be adapted to smaller budgets and staff. Look for Low Cost call-outs throughout the guide.

Overlapping Aspects of Identity: Many gender diverse patients have overlapping aspects of identity related to race, ethnicity, religion, language, or disability. These can shape healthcare experiences and access. Training should include strategies for culturally responsive care, language access resources, and awareness of the ways multiple marginalized identities can compound barriers to care. For example, a Spanish-speaking gender diverse patient may need both language interpretation services and staff familiar with cultural differences in discussing gender identity.



Physical Environment & Visual Cues

Immediate Visual Signals



- **Post nondiscrimination statements** prominently on your website and at check-in. The statements should explicitly include gender identity and gender expression.
- **Display welcoming signage or stickers**, either overt, such as "All genders and sexual orientations welcome," or more subtle, such as "All are welcome."
- **Leave out waiting room materials**—pamphlets, posters, magazines, and children's books—that include diverse representation of all kinds of people, including gender-diverse individuals.
- **Encourage team members to wear name tags with pronouns** (e.g., "Dr. Smith, she/her") to normalize pronoun sharing and demonstrate awareness of gender diversity



Restroom Accessibility

- **Provide single-stall restrooms** whenever possible.
- **Post clear signage at reception** that indicates the locations of all restrooms, including the nearest single-stall option (even if it's around a corner).
- **Consider all-gender restrooms.** Where appropriate, relabel multi-stall facilities with explanatory signage like, "These restrooms welcome everyone and help reduce wait times for families." This way everyone understands the change. It does not have to be framed in terms of gender at all.



Accessibility & Disability Inclusion

- **Accessibility & Disability Inclusion** Ensure your practice is physically accessible to patients with disabilities. This includes ADA-compliant entryways, hallways, and restrooms, adjustable-height exam tables, and staff training in offering mobility assistance respectfully. Accessibility is an essential component of inclusive care.

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Communication & Language

Front-Desk Interactions

- **Replace gendered greetings.** Use “Good morning, how can I help you?” instead of “Yes, sir/ma’am.”
- **Ask universally,** “What name and pronouns should we use for you today?” Briefly explain: “We ask everyone to make sure we get it right.”
- **Handle mistakes gracefully.** If someone is misnamed or mispronounced, make a brief correction (“Sorry—they’re here for their appointment”) and continue. Avoid lengthy apologies that can feel uncomfortable.

Quick Reference Scripts for Front Desk Staff :

- **Greeting:** “Good morning! How can I help you today?”
- **Name/Pronouns:** “What name should we use for you, and do you have pronouns you’d like us to use?” If unsure about pronouns, use “they/them” until confirmed.
- **Mistake Recovery:** “My apologies [correct name] is here for their appointment.”

Default Language Practices

- **Use neutral language** (“this patient,” “they/them”) until you know someone’s pronouns.
- **Choose inclusive medical terminology,** such as “Anyone with a uterus” instead of “women” when discussing organ-specific health.
- **Avoid assumptions** about family structures, relationships, or experiences.



Documentation & Record-Keeping

Intake Forms & Electronic Health Records

- **Use a two-step method for gender information:**
  1. Sex assigned at birth (only relevant for medical history)
  2. Current gender identity (for respectful care)
- **Prioritize chosen names** and make them the primary identifier in charts and EHR displays, with legal names stored separately for billing purposes.
- **Add essential fields for pronouns** and relevant organ inventory to support appropriate screening and care.
- **Create system alerts**. Use EHR flags or banners to remind all staff of correct names/pronouns without revealing private medical details.

Privacy & Billing Considerations

- **Train billing staff** to use gender-neutral diagnostic codes when appropriate so as to prevent insurance denials.
- **Offer privacy protections.** When legally permitted, suppress detailed visit information on insurance statements, especially for adolescents.
- **Update digital communications** to ensure patient portals, appointment reminders, and all outgoing messages display chosen names.



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Staff Training & Development

Ongoing Education

- **Provide both clinical and administrative staff with annual training refreshers** covering respectful terminology, inclusive language, and practical scenarios.
- **Conduct role-playing exercises** for challenging situations (e.g., insurance questions, family conflicts, emergency situations).
- **Designate a knowledgeable team member** (nurse, social worker, physician) as a champion who can answer real-time questions for other staff and track improvement goals over time.

Building Competency

- **Encourage continuing education** on LGBQ+/gender diversity-focused health topics and trauma-informed care.
- **Stay current with best practices** through professional organizations and specialized training opportunities.
- **Create learning opportunities** through case discussions and peer consultation.
- **Crisis & Safety Protocols** Prepare staff to respond quickly and respectfully if a patient experiences harassment, misgendering, or feels unsafe in your office. Training should cover de-escalation techniques, how to intervene, and how to document incidents confidentially to identify patterns and prevent recurrence.

Clinical Care & Referral Networks

Care Coordination

Maintain updated vetted referral lists for specialized services including:

- Pediatric endocrinology (puberty blockers, hormone therapy)
- Mental health providers with expertise in gender diversity
- Speech therapy for voice training
- Fertility preservation counseling
- Support groups and community resources
- **Rural Practice Adaptations:** If no local specialists, develop telehealth partnerships and maintain a list of regional services.

Clinical Considerations

- **Offer choices for physical exams.** Provide options for gown sizes, positioning, and ensuring privacy to minimize distress.
- **Use trauma-informed approaches** that recognize some patients may have had previous negative healthcare experiences.
- **Conduct organ inventories** for all patients
- **Screen appropriately,** basing your screening recommendations on organ inventory and risk factors rather than assumed gender identity.







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Digital & Telehealth Integration

Online Presence

- **Mirror in-person inclusivity** on your website with diverse imagery and inclusive language.
- **Display provider biographies** that include pronouns and statements about affirming care.
- **Enhance patient portals** to add optional pronoun fields and ensure chosen names appear consistently.
- **Offer a virtual office tour on your website.** This can be as simple as a brief video showing your inclusive office features for families to preview.
- **Ensure the platform settings** on your telehealth systems allow for display of chosen names and pronoun sharing.



Quality Improvement & Community Connection

Measuring Your Success

- **Use assessment tools** like the Healthcare Equality Index to benchmark and track your progress towards becoming a more inclusive office.
- **Solicit patient feedback** through brief post-visit surveys asking about name/pronoun respect and overall office climate.
- **Regularly audit and review policies,** forms, and procedures for continued improvement.

Sample Patient Feedback Questions :

1. **Were you addressed by the correct name and pronouns today?**
2. **Did you feel respected by all staff during your visit?**
3. **Was it easy to find a restroom you could use?**

Community Engagement

- **Build relationships with local LGBTQ+ organizations,** PFLAG chapters, and advocacy groups
- **Build relationships with local physicians,** pediatricians, school nurses, and mental health providers to create a trusted referral network for gender-diverse patients and their families..
- **Stay informed.** Attend conferences, webinars, and community events to maintain awareness of evolving needs.



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Implementation Strategy

Getting Started

- Begin with no-cost changes, such as updating language, training current staff, and auditing existing materials. Set realistic goals. Don't try to do everything all at once. Choose three to five initial improvements and set a specific timeline for implementation. Involve your team. Get input from staff about barriers and solutions. Include all staff, from administrative to clinical to management, in these discussions.

Building Momentum

- Celebrate progress by acknowledging improvements and giving positive feedback. Consider helping other practices by sharing what works. Stay committed. Recognize that creating inclusive care is an ongoing process, not a one-time initiative.

Key Takeaways

Inclusion isn't achieved through a single poster or training session—it emerges from many small, consistent actions that communicate: "We see you, we respect you, and we're here to provide excellent care."

Every step toward inclusivity improves the healthcare experience for all patients, creating an environment where everyone can focus on health and healing rather than whether they'll be accepted and respected.

Start where you can, build gradually, and remember that your efforts make a real difference in the lives of gender-diverse youth and their families.The most powerful changes are those that stick: simple practices that become second nature to you and your team, that create lasting transformation in how you serve gender-diverse youth and their families.

Companion Resources

This guide includes two practical handouts designed for immediate use:

- **Inclusive Practice Essentials** - A quick-reference card with the most important daily practices any provider or staff member can use to help every patient feel respected and safe. Ideal for desk reference or team posting.

- **First Steps Checklist** - A 30-60 day implementation guide highlighting simple, low-cost changes that make an immediate difference. Perfect for practices ready to begin but unsure where to start.

Additional Professional Development

- **Project ECHO** - Free tele-mentoring program designed for rural and underserved healthcare providers. Offers case-based learning sessions on various topics including gender-affirming care. Particularly valuable for practices without local specialist access.

- **Professional Organizations** - Many medical and mental health professional associations offer training modules and best practice resources through their continuing education programs.

For the latest version of this guide and companion handouts, visit www.genderspectrum.org/resources



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Handout 1

Inclusive Practice Essentials

Inclusion is not just a value; it is a daily practice. This quick reference sheet distills the most important actions any provider or staff member can take to help every patient feel seen, respected, and safe. Keep it nearby, review it often, and remember even small changes can transform a patient's experience from the very first phone call.

Essentials:

- **Use inclusive language:** avoid gendered greetings and use "they/them" if unsure about pronouns until confirmed.
- **Honor chosen names and pronouns:** make sure they are visible in charts, EHR, and all patient communications.
- **Display visible welcome signals:** signage, stickers, or statements that clearly affirm gender diversity.
- **Provide accessible restrooms:** clearly signpost single-stall or all-gender options.
- **Train all staff annually:** include role-play for real-world scenarios and strategies for de-escalating disrespect.
- **Protect privacy:** ensure billing, portals, and reminders use chosen names and protect sensitive visit details.
- **Build referral networks:** connect with gender-affirming specialists and telehealth partners such as Project ECHO programs, including mental health providers and local school counselors.
- **Gather feedback:** use a brief post-visit survey to track patient experience and identify areas for improvement.
- **Handle mistakes gracefully:** when errors happen, make a brief correction and continue. Lengthy apologies can feel uncomfortable.

Inclusion is built one respectful interaction at a time. These core actions are small in cost, but they create trust, safety, and connection, the foundation for excellent care.

Handout 2

First Steps Checklist – Creating an Inclusive Practice

Creating an inclusive, respectful environment for all patients does not have to be overwhelming. Many of the most meaningful changes cost little or nothing yet send a powerful message: You are welcome here. This checklist highlights simple steps you can take in the first 30–60 days to make a real difference for gender-diverse patients, and for every person who walks through your doors.

Checklist:

Post clear nondiscrimination statements that include gender identity and gender expression on your website and in your waiting area.

- ▫ Replace gendered greetings with inclusive alternatives: "Good morning, how can I help you?".
- ▫ Add chosen name and pronoun fields to intake forms and EHR.
- ▫ Review and update patient portal settings to display chosen names.
- ▫ Display visible signals of welcome, for example, "All Are Welcome Here" stickers at entry points.
- ▫ Provide staff with scripts for greeting patients, asking for pronouns, including how to ask "What name and pronouns should we use for you today?", and handling mistakes respectfully.
- ▫ Identify and clearly label accessible restrooms, including single-stall or family restrooms where possible.
- ▫ Share a quick primer on respectful communication with all staff, including front desk, clinical, and billing teams.
- ▫ **Designate one team member as the "practice champion" for ongoing questions and guidance.**
- ▫ **Begin a log of low-cost or no-cost ideas for ongoing improvement.**

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